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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - CARE CONTINUES TO NEGOTIATE WITH
AL-SHABAAB SPOKESMAN FOR ACCESS TO NEEDY

REF: NAIROBI 2521

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Negotiations continue between al-Shabaab spokesman Mukhtar Robow and humanitarian relief organization CARE over whether CARE can continue to feed one million people in southern and central Somalia. In October, Robow told CARE to leave Somalia or face attack (reftel). CARE says Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) Asmara faction leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys has offered to intervene on CARE's behalf but his efforts, if there have been any, have had no effect yet. Meanwhile, CARE has reluctantly taken initial steps to permanently ramp down its operations. In the short term, the World Food Program (WFP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have agreed to make essential deliveries in CARE's area of responsibility. End summary.

Al-Shabaab Spokesman
Refuses to Withdraw
Threat

¶2. (SBU) At a November 7 meeting, CARE's Somalia country team briefed USAID and Poloff on their to date fruitless negotiations with al-Shabaab and the possibility that they will be forced to close their food distribution programs in southern and central Somalia (reftel). David Gilmour, CARE's Somalia Country Director, said CARE had been talking with al-Shabaab spokesman Mukhtar Robow about CARE's re-entry to Somalia. Robow warned CARE in October to withdraw from "jihadist-held areas," or be attacked. With Somalia's rapidly deteriorating security situation in mind, CARE has drawn down and temporarily suspended its food distribution to one million people in southern and central Somalia.

¶3. (SBU) In addition to Robow, CARE is in contact with Sheikh Dahir Aweys, chairman of a rump faction of the ARS based in Asmara. Aweys favors CARE's return to Somalia, and has offered to lobby Robow on CARE's behalf. Aweys has counseled persistence and patience with the al-Shabaab leader, according to Gilmour.

CARE Draws Down

¶4. (SBU) Gilmour said CARE cannot resume its work until Robow rescinds his threat, which it regards as credible. In anticipation of not being able to return to southern and central Somalia, Gilmour said CARE has started a 3 - 6 month

close-out process. CARE is early in the process, with many steps reversible, but later stages will be more difficult to rescind if negotiations with al-Shabaab fail to bear fruit. Until the end of the year, CARE has handed over its food deliveries to the WFP and ICRC, both of which still operate in southern and central Somalia. CARE will continue its work in Somalia's Puntland and Somaliland regions. Over the long term, CARE may be forced to permanently turn over its food distribution to WFP or subcontractors, if donors agree to waive all-important accountability and monitoring requirements. There is no agency at present ready to pick up CARE's large, non-food aid programs to internally displaced persons, however.

Comment

15. (SBU) In an effort to clear the way for continued humanitarian aid deliveries, CARE has attempted direct talks with Robow, and has endeavored to enlist the help of influential elders, whose clans would be directly affected by a suspension of humanitarian aid, all to no avail. Al-Shabaab via Robow has allegedly blacklisted CARE, and IMC, because it alleges that the NGOs had provided information to the USG that led to attacks on its personnel. Although Robow has, under pressure, rescinded an earlier edict that all international aid organizations should close up shop, he has refused to retract threats made to CARE, whose withdrawal, if it occurs, would mark another milestone in the increasingly difficult environment in which NGOs must work.

RANNEBERGER